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SUBJECT: (U) ASSISTANT SECRETARY BLAKE'S SEPTEMBER 28,  
2009 MEETING WITH BANGLADESHI FOREIGN MINISTER DIPU MONI

Classified By: ASSISTANT SECRETARY ROBLAKE

11. (U) Participants:

U.S.  
Robert O. Blake, SCA Assistant Secretary  
Matthew Lowe, Special Assistant  
Elena Soderblom, Bureau Notetaker

BANGLADESH  
Dipu Moni, Foreign Minister  
Mohamed Mijarul Quayes, Foreign Secretary

12. (U) SUMMARY. In a meeting on the margins of UNGA with South and Central Asian Affairs Assistant Secretary Blake, Foreign Minister Moni expressed enthusiasm regarding the potential benefits of improved Indo-Bangladeshi relations, adding that both sides intend to cooperate more on security, water and regional issues. Moni related that Bangladesh plans to stay engaged with Burma to determine maritime boundaries and to prevent further Rohingya persecution and migration. The Foreign Minister also requested that the U.S. repatriate "the self-confessed killers of the father of the nation," and contended that trials of opposition party members sought to "heal the wounds." END SUMMARY.

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BANGLADESH FOCUSED ON CLIMATE CHANGE  
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13. (U) Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dipu Moni commended the U.S. for its focus in UNGA on food security and climate change, both of which will impact Bangladesh. Moni related that while rising sea levels could displace as many as 20 million people in the future, the country must already contend with increased soil salinity and severe floods. In response, the Prime Minister has called for the development of saline-resistant seeds, about which Bangladesh has started talks with the International Rice Institute in Manila, Moni reported.

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CLEARING THE COBWEBS OF INDO-BANGLADESHI RELATIONS  
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14. (U) Blake observed that Moni had made a productive visit to India. Moni explained that her trip served the dual purpose of paving the way for the Prime Minister's upcoming visit, and starting to "clear the cobwebs" of 26 years of tension between the two countries. Moni said that India, and Bangladesh, political motives have long been misperceived by both sides, and that communication, domestically and bilaterally, is the key to improved relations. The longstanding relationship between the Awami League in Bangladesh and Congress Party in India has also helped, she recognized. Both countries are eager to work

together on counter-terrorism, trade and investment, water sharing, and road/transport connectivity. Foreign Secretary Quayes underscored that Indian officials have exhibited "a readiness to go the extra mile" in talks. Blake encouraged the growing bond, noting that India,s increasing confidence and economic success puts it in a position to forge regional stability, to the benefit of Bangladesh and its neighbors.

15. (U) Blake supported the need for improved regional connectivity, noting the great potential for trade, and suggesting the Indo-Sri Lankan Free Trade Agreement as a model. Moni expressed regret at the lack of physical connectivity, noting that many links, such as roads and railways, have remained disconnected even as regional relations improve. She said that Bangladesh and India now have a commitment to finalize a water sharing agreement, and are working to allow Nepal and Bhutan port access across Indian borders. While efforts to improve bilateral trade are underway, the two countries lack sufficient cooperation on counter terrorism, and plan to improve border control to check illegal movement. The Prime Minister will continue to promote her regional task force proposal, seeking to improve multilateral cooperation in fighting terrorist organizations and the networks that allow these organizations to operate across borders.

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ENGAGING WITH BURMA  
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16. (C) Noting the Administration,s decision to re-start Assistant Secretary level engagement with Burma, Blake inquired about Bangladeshi relations with Burma, including maritime boundary disputes. Moni maintained that constant engagement and communication are the keys to avoiding misunderstanding, and mitigating possible military action. She seemed confident that their relationship would move in a positive direction through renewed bilateral discussions, after 22 years of severed ties. She also noted that Bangladesh, Burma and India have a "gentlemen,s agreement" to avoid all gas exploration in disputed territories.

17. (U) Moni said Bangladesh is weary of the way Burma has handled the Rohingya refugee problem, but hopes that progress will be made after the next Burmese elections. After removing the group from its ethnic minority list in December, Burma has now reacknowledged the Rohingya as Burmese, but has yet to address the persecution returning refugees continue to face. She suggested that the Burmese government need to fix the economic and cultural disparities that keep producing a "steady flow" of refugees. Moni requested international assistance in pressuring Burma to look at citizenship policies.

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LABOR RIGHTS AND TRAFFICKING  
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18. (U) Blake suggested that Bangladesh should continue improving workers, rights, particularly in export processing zones. Moni said that in a recent Cabinet meeting with the National Welfare Association, the GOB had decided to allow these workers the right to organize. She touted the importance of labor rights to her country, noting that the father of the nation was once a leader of dock workers. The GOB is also working to improve labor conditions for garment workers, she reported, and has started to engage with other countries to guarantee rights for migrant workers. Moni thanked the U.S. for our pressure on the Gulf states on this matter, and asked for support for an international compact. She also noted future talks with the Philippines and Sri Lanka to reduce trafficking abuses.

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ACKNOWLEDGING KOSOVO,S INDEPENDENCE  
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19. (U) Blake requested that Bangladesh acknowledge Kosovo,s

independence, noting the large number of countries and international organizations that have already done so. Moni said that her country is giving it "active consideration," and acknowledged that at least eleven countries in the Organization of Islamic Countries have recognized Kosovo.

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REPATRIATING SHEIKH MUJIB,S KILLERS  
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¶10. (C) The Foreign Minister requested our support in repatriating the accused killers of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (father of the current PM), known to be in the U.S. She urged that even without an extradition treaty, such important issues should be handled on a case-by-case basis, and noted that we have obliged similar cases before. Blake responded that the lack of an extradition treaty can make repatriation difficult, but promised to look into the matter.

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WAR CRIMES TRIBUNAL  
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¶11. (U) Moni also mentioned Bangladesh,s intention to try its accused war criminals. She maintained that these trials were to prosecute crimes, not to pursue a political agenda. She vowed that the trials would adhere to international standards. Blake agreed that these trials must be done correctly and transparently in a way that does not undermine democracy in Bangladesh.  
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